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Populist Mobilization Across Time and Space: An Introduction

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Abstract: *Populism has become pervasive in political language and in the diagnosis of the malaise of contemporary politics. At the same time, more narrow definitions of populism have become shared in scholarship on the subject, nourishing more analytical approaches that put populism in historical and cross-regional perspective. The purpose of this introduction is to use the evidence assembled in this special issue to ask some fundamental questions concerning the study of populist mobilization. Most importantly, what do we gain and what do we lose from sight by focusing on the commonalities between parties based on their populist appeals, when populist parties differ dramatically in terms of the substantive ideologies they adhere to? Are there distinctive features in terms of voter attitudes that underlie populist mobilization? And if failures of political representation and populism are intimately related, can we expect populists to render party systems more responsive to voters' substantive policy preferences?*

Keywords: Populism, Parties, Ideology, Party systems, Representation

As populism seems to become ever more widespread in different regions of the world, there is a growing consensus on a minimal definition of the phenomenon that centers on its ideological traits. In Mudde and Kaltwasser's (2013) terms, populism is a "thin ideology" that builds on the juxtaposition of the elite and the people. Employing this discourse enables charismatic leaders to mobilize citizens who no longer feel represented by established political actors. The aim of this special issue is to gauge the contribution of the concept of populism to our understanding of political mobilization in the recent period and to compare these instances of populist mobilization to earlier ones. While more and more phenomena are looked at through the lens of populism, it is important to know how important this thin ideology is compared to the host ideologies that these parties or movements almost invariably also exhibit, and thus how similar they really are. For example, how much do we gain in looking at the populist radical right in terms of the concept of populism, rather than theories from the established literature on the radical or extreme right?

The growing consensus on what populism constitutes has the advantage of allowing for comparisons across time and space. While populism can be associated with various more substantive "host ideologies" such as socialism or cultural traditionalism and nativism, a common definition allows us to compare its left-wing, right-wing, and more "pure" manifestations that fail to exhibit clear-cut affinities to host ideologies. How far, then, do the commonalities between left-wing and right-wing populist mobilization go? The aim of this exercise is not to proclaim either the populism lens or more classical approaches as superior to the other, but rather to contribute to a fruitful cross-fertilization or integration of approaches. Certainly, in looking through the lens of populism, we should not forget

everything we have learned when explaining more specific instances of populist mobilization based on different approaches. Our efforts to understand the challenge posed by new political actors – whether they are of a populist type or not – should be truly cumulative.

This introduction is organized around five themes. I start by discussing the growing consensus in understanding populism as a set of ideas, and use the contributions to this special issue to take stock of the varied ways populist parties and movements have conceptualized "the people" and "the elite" across space and time. I then go on to discuss the relationship between populism and substantive ideologies, exploring the potential for the populism approach and more traditional theories of party system change to fruitfully nourish one another. The third section turns to the demand side of populism, and looks at the distinctiveness of populist mobilization in terms of voter orientations, and how these may contribute to our understandings of the social structural underpinnings of populism on the left and right. This leads up to the final two sections that address the relationship between populism and representation: If populism is a consequence of failures of political representation, what are the consequences of the emergence of populist challengers for the substantive representation of voters' policy preferences? In the final section, I ask whether different types of populist mobilization – those whose appeal is confined to specific segments of the electorate as opposed to those capable of winning electoral majorities – may have diverging effects on substantive political representation.

Putting Populism in Comparative Perspective

One part of the literature sees populism as a discourse or a distinctively top-down strategy of political mobilization (e.g., Weyland 2001), or as in the vast literature on the radical right, simply as an additional feature that specific party types use to mobilize voters. In a similar vein, in their conceptual framework for understanding the "Left Turn" of the late 1990s and 2000s in Latin America, Levitsky and Roberts (2011: 12-13) highlight the concentration of authority in the hands of a dominant personality as a distinguishing feature of the populist left as opposed to other currents of the left. More recently, definitions of populism have become both more demanding and more empirically precise. Despite some remaining disagreement on whether populism is a "thin ideology" or simply a type of discourse, much of the current research converges on what has been termed the "ideational" approach to populism. Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (forthcoming) identifying the latter's first central element as a dualistic worldview, a Manichean juxtaposition between "the good" and "the evil", or "the people" and "the elite". Furthermore, the people and the elite are seen as homogeneous entities, constituting populism's anti-pluralist ideological core that is reflected in the idea that politics should be the expression of the "volonté générale" or the general will of the people, as argued by Canovan (2002) and Mudde (2004: 543).[1] Based on the success of populists' discourse that centers on the idea that "the people" has been betrayed by the "the elite", the diagnosis of the ideational approach is one of a generalized crisis of democratic representation that makes citizens susceptible to being mobilized against a corrupt and self-serving elite (c.f. Caramani 2017; Hawkins 2010; Hawkins et al. forthcoming; Mudde 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). According to Rooduijn's (2014) analysis, being anti-elite, pro-people, conjuring up the homogeneity of the people, and

[1] This illiberal element even constitutes the core of populism according to Pappas' (2016) minimal definition.

cultivating a permanent crisis actually constitutes the smallest common denominator of the various approaches to populism. The advantage of the ideational definition is thus that it is both precise and encompassing enough to grasp those phenomena that researchers on populism are most concerned with.

In this conception, populism is compatible with a range of distinct "host" or "thick" ideologies that populism can cling onto (e.g., Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). As Mény and Surel (2000) have pointed out, "the people" can be defined in various ways, namely, politically (the sovereign), culturally (the nation), or in economic terms (in categories of class, but also in more recent forms such as "the hard working" as against the lazy, and so forth), accounting for the malleable character of populism. Nonetheless, the minimal definition offered by the ideational approach allows for a clear distinction between populist and non-populist forms of mobilization in theoretical terms, as well as for drawing the boundaries between populist worldviews and other manifestations of democratic malaise such as political alienation, or lack of political trust (e.g., Hawkins 2010; Hawkins et al. forthcoming).

The contributions to this special issue attest to the basic commonalities in the worldviews that populists evoke across time, from the 19th century to present, and space, from Latin America, over Northern America to Southern and Northern Europe. Going back to the 1970s, Manucci and Weber (2017, this issue) show that populism is a cyclical phenomenon in the five Western European countries studied, and not something that is characteristic of the most recent past. In his analysis of the antebellum "Know Nothings" and the post-Civil War People's Party in the US, and late 19th century Boulangism in France, Betz (2017, this issue) shows that both populism and nativism are old phenomena. They frequently, but not always go together. The broad temporal scope of Betz' analysis also reveals two additional important points: First, except for the case of Boulangism, populist mobilization does not seem to require charismatic leaders, but can also take the form of movements. This suggests that populism should indeed be considered an ideology, rather than an organizational feature of parties or movements. Second, populism and nativism are both highly malleable, and compatible with cultural and economic causes. Specifically, nativism can be framed as a remedy both against cultural threat, as well as socioeconomic anxieties. With respect to populism, the findings presented by Ivaldi et al. (2017, this issue) point in a similar direction. While a reference to "the people" is common to all the instances of populism they study, the French Front National and the Italian Lega Nord define "the people" culturally in terms of nationals as opposed to foreigners, while Podemos in Spain and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement) in Italy use a broader definition encompassing "the underprivileged" or even simply the "common citizen". Likewise, Huber and Ruth (2017, this issue) argue that parties' host-ideology determines the nature of the antagonism between "the people" and "the elite".

This does not mean, however, that populism is compatible with, or beneficial to any other form of mobilization. Aguilar and Carlin's (2017, this issue) analysis based on a survey-experiment shows that even under the favorable conditions provided by the widespread disenchantment with the political class in Chile, historical memories or the extremeness of a candidate in terms of her host ideology may severely limit the effectiveness of populist messages. We might recall that in the case of the radical populist right in Western Europe, abandoning overt racism and instead adopting cultural differentialism or ethno-pluralism (see Antonio 2000) constituted a necessary condition for these parties' capacity to mobilize more than marginal shares of the vote (e.g., Carter

2005; Golder 2003; Ignazi 2002; Rydgren 2005). Aguilar and Carlin's call for an effort at theorizing the scope conditions of successful populist mobilization is therefore well put.

Populism and Substantive Ideologies

Journalistic accounts often reduce the success of political newcomers to their populist appeals. But the evidence presented in the contributions to this special issue strongly suggests that the substantive ideologies involved in populist mobilization matter a great deal. This raises the question what we lose from sight by placing emphasis on the populist element in the mobilization of challenger parties. Rydgren (2017), for example, warns us that by analyzing the radical right in terms of populism, the ideological core of these parties risks being lost from sight. The new radical right is clearly populist, "but these are not the most pertinent features of these parties" (Rydgren 2017: 9). In fact, an earlier literature identified the ideological core and explained the electoral success of these parties in terms of authoritarianism, nationalism, nativism, and anti-universalism, or more specifically their anti-immigrant positions, while relegating their populist rhetoric to a more ephemeral status (e.g., Betz 1994; 2004; Bornschier 2010; Kitschelt 1995; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2005). Likewise, Kriesi (2014: 369) argues that the social structural grievances that populists mobilize are often more intimately related to their more specific ideologies, rather than the thin ideology of populism.

Indeed, several contributions to this special issue underscore that left and right populism have distinct determinants of success. The most pertinent cases to test this proposition are of course those where voters are presented with the alternative of supporting a populist party of the left or one on the right. Focusing on the Netherlands as such as case, Akkerman et al. (2017, this issue), show that populist orientations form a coherent set of beliefs that is not reducible to political distrust, and that the electorates of the Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party) and the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom) share.[2] At the same time, electorates sort themselves as a function of populist parties' core ideology – protectionism, anti-globalization, pro-welfare in the case of the populist left, and anti-immigration preferences for the populist right. A vote for a populist party in the Netherlands is not simply a protest vote, but one with a clear mandate. What is more, where actors link the thin ideology of populism to substantive ideologies, they rarely draw up fundamentally new dimensions of political competition, but rather reinforce existing dimensions by occupying more radical positions than mainstream parties do (Bornschier 2010; Kriesi et al. 2008).[3]

Established theories of party system change emphasize the processes of dealignment and realignment of specific electoral groups as a consequence of evolving voter demands on the one hand, and changing party positions on the other (e.g., Bornschier 2010; Dalton et al. 1984; Kitschelt 1994; 1995; Kriesi et al. 2008; Martin 2000; Mayhew 2000; Schattschneider

[2] To measure populist attitudes, the authors build on earlier work by Hawkins et al. (2012), and Akkerman et al. (2014).

[3] To add a nuance, populist parties may to some degree transform existing dimensions by altering their substantive meaning. Thus, the libertarian-authoritarian dimension prevalent in Western Europe as a consequence of the mobilization of the New Left from the 1970s onwards was transformed by the emergence of the immigration issue in the 1980s and 1990s, and came to center more strongly on the competing definitions of the national community (Bornschier 2010: Chap. 1). It is worth noting that almost everywhere, it was the established center-right parties, and not the radical populist right, that first politicized the immigration issue in the 1980s, as Ignazi (2003) shows.

1975 [1960]). Combining this approach with that centering on populism allows us to distinguish instances where populism catalyzes the mobilization of political outsiders with strong substantive ideologies from those where populism takes a more "pure" form. Where populism takes center stage – and almost becomes a "thick ideology", because references to other ideologies remain fuzzy or incoherent – the concept of populism is a much more powerful tool to explain political change than established approaches. The Italian Movimento Cinque Stelle, which simply refers to "the common citizen", according to Ivaldi et al. (2017, this issue), is probably the best example. While still an ephemeral phenomenon in Western Europe, the recent successes of "center populists" in East-Central Europe suggest that this party type may be more prevalent elsewhere (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Havlík and Stanley 2015; Havlík and Voda 2016). We might hypothesize that populism in its pure form becomes a viable tool for mobilization only when disenchantment with the established parties is more widespread or almost near universal (Kriesi 2014: 370), or has already led to an erosion of support for the political system more generally (Doyle 2011; Hawkins 2010).

Greece is a special case in this respect because its main populist party, SYRIZA, stands clearly on the left. But Andreadis and Stavrakakis (2017, this issue) reveal that for all the left-wing rhetoric employed by SYRIZA, its voters are aligned with the party primarily in terms of populist attitudes, and their preferences against austerity and the impositions of the Troika. While thus having a basis in substantive issue preferences beyond populist attitudes, the mobilization of SYRIZA transcends general left-right placements, as well as substantive economic policy, immigration and law and order positions. I will return to the differences in terms of the ideological distinctiveness of populist parties' support coalitions after discussing the demand side of populism and the relationship between populism and representation.

What Underlies Populist Mobilization?

If it is important not to discard thick ideologies in our attempt to understand populist mobilization, what do we lose from sight when failing to appreciate what is specific to populism? Party system scholars tend to focus too much on substantive issue preferences and their roots in social structure, and to consider everything else as outside the realm of programmatic politics. The first lesson to learn from populism research is that this provides an inadequate picture of what electoral choice and recent party system transformations are about. This is not only illustrated by the examples of "pure" populism discussed above. Even where voters are driven both by substantive issue preferences and populist attitudes, the latter are not simply an empty shell that accompanies the former. The effect of populist attitudes does not disappear when substantive policy preferences are introduced into models of vote choice, as Akkerman et al. (2017, this issue) analysis shows. Van Hauwaert and van Kessel (2017) confirm that populist attitudes complement policy preferences in shaping vote decisions for the populist left and right across several European countries. Interestingly, they show that populist appeals allow radical parties to mobilize beyond their core constituency of similarly radical voters.

What, then, moves voters who let populist attitudes shape their electoral behavior? By incorporating a focus on the demand side of populism, recent scholarship has made important advances in explaining the correlates and determinants of populist attitudes at the voter level. Populist voters seem to have a troubled relationship not only with the political system, but also with their subjective social status. These are two distinct causes

of populism, but it is also plausible to expect that they are related. Starting with political disenchantment and distrust, this factor has been evoked early on to explain populist support, as already discussed. The recent study by Spruyt et al. (2016) shows empirically that populist attitudes are embedded in deep feelings of discontent. Two contributions to this special issue delve deeper into the psychological underpinnings of populism. Castanho Silva et al. (2017, this issue) use an experimental design based on a sample of US citizens to show that conspiracy beliefs are related to populist worldviews and support for populist candidates. Although conspiracy beliefs are associated with all elements of the populist worldview – anti-elitism, people-centrism, and a Manichean worldview – the link to the one that values the good "common people" is especially strong. The authors theorize that conspiracy beliefs and populist attitudes have common roots in the belief in the deceptive nature of authorities.

Who are the populists then? Rico et al. (2017, this issue) show that it is not the worst off that develop populist attitudes. This result is similar to findings that it is not the most disadvantaged in terms of income, employment, or economic competition that support the radical populist right in Europe (Bornschier and Kriesi 2013; Kurer 2017; Mayer 2014; for a more encompassing review, see Bornschier 2018). By studying the emotional underpinnings of populism, and showing that anger, and not fear underlie populist attitudes, Rico et al. (2017, this issue) further nuance recent research that shows that those who feel relatively deprived – meaning that they feel that they receive less than they deserve – develop populist worldviews and support populist parties (Elchardus and Spruyt 2012; 2016; Spruyt et al. 2016).[4] More specifically, the authors find that of the emotions elicited by Spain's economic crisis, some were conductive to populist mobilization, while other were not. Populism is not the reaction of the hopeless among those who believe that they do not receive the social recognition they deserve, but of those with internal political efficacy beliefs, who angrily demand their share from an elite that is seen as self-serving and unresponsive. As Spruyt et al. (2016: 343) put it, populism is a "hopeful" ideology. Fear, on the other hand, is associated with conservatism, as Rico et al. (2017, this issue) note. As the authors underline, future research should focus on the way demand-side factors conductive to populist mobilization interact with supply-side factors, particular with the type of populism (left or right) prevalent in the party system. Thus, we have yet to understand how the individual-level underpinnings of populism interact with thick ideologies to make some voters support left-wing populism and others right-wing populism. In fact, in their concluding reflections on this special issue, Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, this issue) identify the relationship and interaction between populism and the other ideologies as one of the lacunae in current research in the field.

Party systems scholars have a lot to contribute to models that integrate the demand and supply sides of party competition. The lesson they have to learn from recent scholarship on populism is that they may have to amend the social categories they typically look at. The subjective social categories that populism research has shown to breed populist attitudes matter just as much as the social structural variables such as class and education that party system researchers often employ. In fact, it seems most fruitful to study how

[4] In combination with prior research, this suggests that relative deprivation predicts both populist attitudes, as well as individuals' substantive ideological positions: Teney et al. (2014) show that relative deprivation also negatively predicts cosmopolitanism and tolerance towards immigrants, and thus relates to the thick ideology the radical populist right voices in Western Europe.

class, education, relative deprivation, and lack of political support interact in shaping voter alignments.

Populism and Representation

Representation failure and the claim of responsiveness lie at the root of populism (Caramani 2017). This is what populists claim, and many scholars concur in identifying mainstream parties' lack of responsiveness to voter preferences or even party system "cartelization" (Katz and Mair 1995) as the main cause of populist success – as mentioned at the outset of this introduction. Interestingly, this proposition has almost never been rigorously tested empirically. One of the difficulties involved is finding a yardstick to assess whether representation before the appearance of populist challengers was good or bad, and for which segments of the electorate, an issue I will return to later.

What is possible, on the other hand, is to study whether populists fulfill their promise to re-establish the "will of the people". Several contributions to this special issue provide significant advances in our understanding of populism and representation. In an analysis covering all European countries, Huber and Ruth (2017, this issue) investigate whether populists honor their claim to bring politics closer to the people, thereby increasing political participation, and to close the representation gap by improving the ideological congruence between parties and voters. Their findings for left and right populists are nuanced: While the former improve the overall quality of representation in party systems, the latter make participation more equal in terms of status by bringing people (back) into politics. Andreadis and Stavrakakis (2017, this issue), on the other hand, use populism as a substantive dimension along others to measure ideological congruence between parties and voters. As noted earlier, the populism dimension together with the anti-EU/anti-Troika dimension are pivotal in Greece and it is along these dimensions that both SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks (ANEL) are aligned with their respective voters, accounting for the unlikely government coalition between the far left and the far right. SYRIZA voters are not well represented on other substantive dimensions such as economic policy, begging the question of how enduring an alignment based exclusively on populism and national sovereignty may be.

The Swiss case is instructive here. Ostracism on the part of the established parties towards new contenders is uncommon in this country, and populists thus attain governing power more easily than elsewhere. Nonetheless, as Bernhard (2017, this issue) shows, the three radical populist right parties present in Switzerland – the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Lega dei Ticinesi, and the Geneva Citizens' Movement – clearly exhibit a populist profile and continue to do so even after entering regional or even national government. Bernhard's fine-grained analysis reveals a "division of roles" in which politicians from populist parties that occupy positions of government may hardly use populist rhetoric, while prominent oppositional figures from these same parties continue to do so very strongly.

To the degree that populism triggers strong reactions from parties defending liberal or pluralist conceptions of democracy, populism may give rise to a relatively enduring regime dimension. Different from the regime dimensions in several Latin American countries with their legacies of military rule (Hawkins et al. 2010; Moreno 1999), the regime dimension triggered by populism is not simply about more or less democracy. Rather, it mirrors a conflict about different conceptions of democracy. Liberal democracy balances vertical accountability between citizens and representatives against liberal freedom rights, horizontal accountability and the rule of law (Dahl 1971; 1989). Populists privilege vertical

accountability or even proclaim it to be the only relevant standard, and thus adhere to a "radical" (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012), or strongly majoritarian approach to democracy (Caramani 2017). Under the effect of the radical populist right in Europe, populism may become an enduring feature of politics because the antagonism between liberal democracy and radical plebiscitarian democracy maps quite neatly onto the conflict between universalistic as opposed to traditionalist-communitarian values that these parties thrive on (see Bornschier 2010: Chap. 1). Left-wing populism, on the other hand, is associated with the traditional economic state-market dimension, and may prove resilient either in an infinite battle against the mainstream left that is accused of adhering to the neo-liberal consensus and having abandoned Socialism, or in oppositions against the European Union and the global economy. At least in the cases studied by Ivaldi et al. (2017, this issue), despite their otherwise distinctive ideological profiles, left and right-wing populists have actually converged in depicting banks, corporations, financial institutions, and the EU as part of an elite that betrays the economic interests of the people.

Because of the existence of contrasting conceptions of democracy and the potentially uneasy relationship between the sub-components of liberal democracy, the relationship between populism and democracy is also ambivalent (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, this issue). One factor that matters in determining whether populism is "a threat or a corrective to democracy" (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) is whether populists actually govern. For Latin America, empirical research shows that populist actors in opposition have a positive influence on the quality of democracy, while their influence is negative when they are in government (Huber and Schimpf 2016). More specifically, Ruth (2017) reveals an erosion of horizontal accountability in Latin America as populists have reached the presidency (see also Houle and Kenny 2016).

Are there Persistent Differences between Types of Populism?

Contrary to the thesis of a "populist Zeitgeist" (Mudde 2004), which is widely shared in academic publics in Europe as well as in the media, populism at least until recently has not been contagious: Mainstream parties have not become more populist in Western Europe, and the newspapers seen to curb populist discourses, rather than amplifying them, as Manucci and Weber (2017, this issue) find. Populism comes in waves, and waves also recede, thus there is no secular trend towards populism. In their reflections on this special issue, Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, this issue) maintain that this is one of the productive conclusions that grow out of the ideational approach to populism.

In most of Western Europe, populism remains confined to radical parties of the left and right that reach sizable vote shares, but not majority status – contrary to populist parties or presidential candidates in Latin America and elsewhere. Indeed, a characteristic that sets right-wing populists in Western Europe apart from left-wing populists in Latin America is that, despite the similarities in their discourses, their support coalition differs dramatically. The radical populist right in Europe is firmly rooted in social structure (e.g., Bornschier and Kriesi 2013; Minkenberg and Perrineau 2007; Oesch 2013), and rallies an electorate that closely mirrors the substantive ideology of these parties themselves (Bornschier 2010). The appeal of the populist right, in other words, is restricted to rather specific segments of the electorate whose anti-universalistic preferences were not represented prior to the breakthrough of the populist right, and these electoral segments perceived a failure of democratic representation. In countries such as Venezuela, Greece, Italy, and perhaps Spain, the legitimacy gap is far wider. Even more so than what

Andreadis and Stavrakakis (2017, this issue) find for Greece, the electorate of the left-wing populist Bolivarian movement in Venezuela is extremely incoherent in terms of substantive ideology, suggesting that these voters are united by little more than their rejection of the political establishment (Bornschier forthcoming; Hawkins 2010).

One type of populism, exemplified by the radical populist right in Western Europe, thus has the capacity to improve representation by representing the substantive policy preferences of its voters. I propose to call this type "segmented populism" due to the very specific electoral groups it rallies in ideological and social structural terms. The other type may be called "majoritarian populism", because it encompasses much more diverse groups. Almost by definition, the latter type cannot improve the congruence between parties and voters because of the divergent policy preferences or lack clear preferences that the populist coalition encompasses (for a more extended version of this argument, see Bornschier forthcoming).

This points to the existence of different types of populism, whose consequences for the representation of substantive policy preferences differ profoundly. To grasp these differences, the ideational approach to populism should be brought into fruitful dialogue with more established theories of party system change such as cleavage theory and the concepts of dealignment and realignment (Bornschier forthcoming; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, this issue; Roberts 2015). As this introduction has sought to show, the contributions to this special issue help us to make important steps in this direction. They do so by illuminating the relationship between populism and other ideological features that populists exhibit over space and time, by developing tools to establish commonalities and differences across countries in terms of demand side of populism, and by assessing the relationship between populism and representation.

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